

Collaborative Writing in the CLIL Classroom: Learning through Wikis

Título: Collaborative Writing in the CLIL Classroom: Learning through Wikis. **Target:** Secciones bilingües AICLE en 2º de ESO. **Asignatura:** Ciencias naturales impartidas en lengua inglesa. **Autor:** Jon Ander Merino Villar, Licenciado en Filología Inglesa, Profesor Inglés, Español, Lingüística.

The next paragraphs will propose the introduction of wikis in a CLIL¹ class in the secondary education in Spain as a way to help our students to develop their writing skills in the foreign language at the same time they practice and widen their knowledge in the non-linguistic curricular content. In the subsequent paragraphs it will be examined how and to what extent a collaborative writing through the implementation of wikis could benefit our students' writing skill in the foreign language.

Concretely, the activity proposed here is going to be focused on a CLIL class of Natural Sciences taught in English, in the 2nd year of ESO², in an average Secondary School in Spain. This methodology will take place entirely online, through wikis³. The use of wikis as a modern way to practice language and content, and as an ideal setting to work collaboratively, providing and receiving feedback both on content and on form will certainly involve a great extent of motivation by our target students. Naturally, students' motivation is a crucial element in the process of learning, especially in the process of acquiring an L2. Thus, learners are expected to do their best in order to complete their task in an environment that will be as collaborative as possible. Specific information about the procedure and techniques of the activity proposed here will be detailed in the methodology section. Prior to that, the following paragraph will introduce and define the concept of wikis. That will be followed by the next section in which the most significant research done to date will be referred and pertinently commented.

In order to begin with an accurate description for wiki, we can first mention the definition provided by the New Oxford American Dictionary (2005) which states that wikis are "web sites that allow collaborative editing of its content and structure by their users". The term wiki was coined by the American computer programmer Ward Cunningham (1949-), who pioneered the wikis when in 1995 he launched Wikiwikiweb (<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiWikiWeb>), the first wiki. According to Cunningham (2005), he chose the term wiki-wiki from Hawaiian "as an alliterative substitute for 'quick' and thereby avoided naming this stuff quick-web"⁴.

Although the whole potential of wikis as instructional tools are still to be researched (Achterman, 2006), there are some palpable facts that make consider them as really convenient ingredients in the process of teaching/learning an L2. For instance, the fact that wikis can be edited numerous times makes them an ideal medium for a collaborative construction of knowledge. Wikis are simple and easy to edit and they also allow users to create non-linear documents using hyperlinks. Furthermore,

all edits of a wiki can be tracked and reviewed. This creates an ideal environment for reflection and metacognition for the learners. Moreover, wikis allow teachers to track individual and also group progress while learners collaborate on the production of their assigned tasks.

RATIONAL FOR THIS PROPOSAL

There are several authors who have advocated in favor of the use of wikis, considering them as a potentially useful tool in the L2 classroom, as well as a convenient resource for developing the communicative skills of either the student's L1 or any L2 he may be learning. Clearly, one of the key benefits of wikis is that they really assist in promoting a higher level of interactivity (Siegle, 2008). This student collaboration can include editing and adding new text, pictures, video and other multimedia functions (Beldarrain, 2006).

In addition, when students attempt to edit a wiki, they are always required to read critically what has been written by others, collaborating on the building of a whole project. Thus, they will often have to edit parts that were started by a classmate. This is definitely a huge shift in the way students usually work. Siegle (2008) pointed out that, "Student interactions are at the heart of a learner-centered constructivist environment, and teaching with the Web has provided unique opportunities to promote those interactions" (p.12).

Another benefit that working with wikis entails is the capability of the instructor to facilitate and store student work. A record of all edits on a wiki can be kept for the teacher to evaluate each student's level of contribution to the collectively created document. Apart from having access to review the wikis anytime, instructors have also the ability to make appropriate comments on the wiki, whenever their feedback may be necessary for the students.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, an effective activity with wikis will be proposed. The methodology and sample assignment provided here have been designed for second graders of ESO, and centered in a CLIL Natural-Sciences class, which is taught predominantly in English⁵. Needless to say, the instructor can adapt this type of methodology to a different CLIL course –perhaps in a different level– that s/he may be teaching.

At the beginning of the trimester, the instructor will create a private wiki and invite all his/her students in the course, making sure that all of them join it. Wikispaces (www.wikispaces.com), Wikia (www.wikia.com) and Wiki-site (www.wiki-site.com) are good examples of wiki hosting sites instructors can choose. Once the instructor has selected a wiki and all the students are in it, the instructor will divide the class into groups of five students.

The actual project setup: a sample assignment

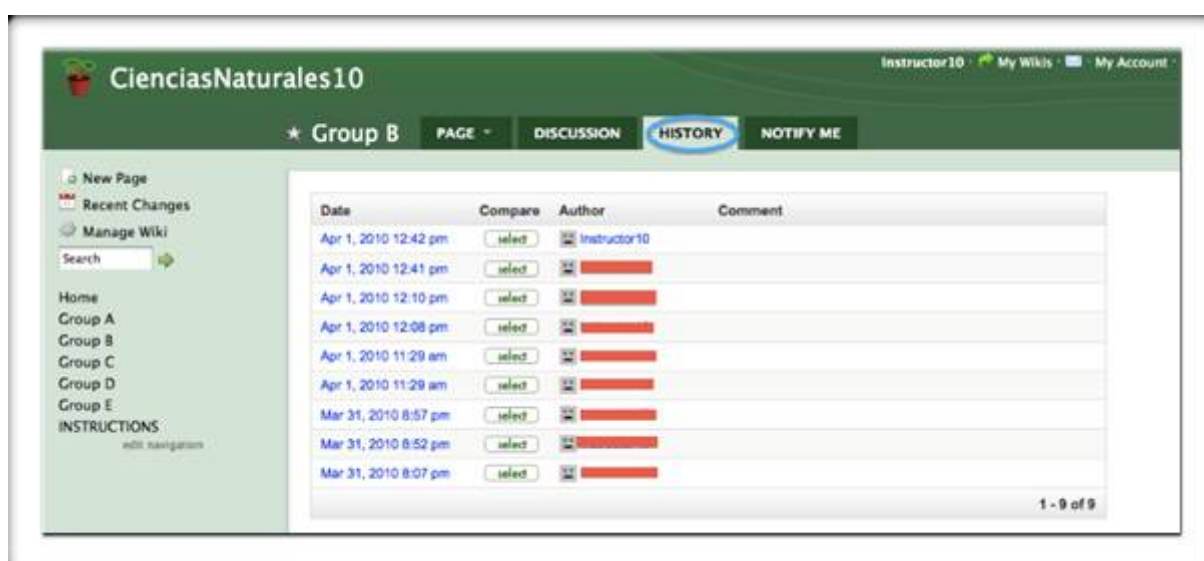
The proposed task to be done by the students can be assigned once a week or every two weeks, at the discretion of the instructor. Thus, prior to the first day of class in every week, the instructor should have selected a specific topic for each group, related to what was previously introduced in class⁶ (in

terms of content). Then, during each week's first day of class⁷, the instructor will post the assignment for each group on their respective page in the wiki. He should choose a similar task but with different content for each of the groups. The students would see something like the sample assignment below –focused, as said, on a Natural-Sciences class.

Each group's task at this point will be to create a document that covers in depth all the points included in the outline provided by the teacher in the indications for the assignment. In order to do that, students will have to search for appropriate content on the net and also add relevant pictures or any other kind of media they consider relevant⁸, such as videos, internet links, audio files, etc. All the students in a each group are expected to work in a similar proportion. At the end of the day, the instructor will always notice⁹ whether there is somebody in the group who is working less than what s/he is required, and whose missing work is being completed by the rest of the components of the group. Needless to say, feedback and collaborative learning among all the members of the group is always encouraged. The final version of the text will be finished on the wiki by the deadline. The expected final result should be something like the sample that follows.

Assessment

The instructor will assess the group's overall work, but always making certain that all the members in the group have participated in similar amounts. Thanks to the digital signature that will appear after every edit, the instructor will always be able to identify who has written or edited what, and when that took place. This can be appreciated in the image below:



| Date | Compare | Author | Comment |
|----------------------|------------------------|--------------|---------|
| Apr 1, 2010 12:42 pm | select | Instructor10 | |
| Apr 1, 2010 12:41 pm | select | | |
| Apr 1, 2010 12:10 pm | select | | |
| Apr 1, 2010 12:08 pm | select | | |
| Apr 1, 2010 11:29 am | select | | |
| Apr 1, 2010 11:29 am | select | | |
| Mar 31, 2010 8:57 pm | select | | |
| Mar 31, 2010 8:52 pm | select | | |
| Mar 31, 2010 8:07 pm | select | | |

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Students should be evaluated principally in terms of content (50%)¹⁰; language quality i.e., the structure and English grammar of what they have written (30%); and students' individual commitment on the project (20%).

CONCLUSIONS

As several authors have suggested and some studies revealed, if appropriately implemented, wikis can be a really effective tool in the classroom. The essence of CLIL classes allows an introduction of wikis in which the student, apart from learning and reinforcing his written proficiency in the L2, will also practice and enhance the content taught in class. In order to achieve all these objectives, the student is required to find any relevant information –principally on the Web– that must be selected and adapted according on his/her own and the rest of the group's criterion. Furthermore, this will take place in an innovative environment which is ideal for collaborative learning to take place, where all the group members will play a reciprocated supporting role.

Notes

¹Content and Language Integrated Learning: http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/language-teaching/doc236_en.htm

²Spanish acronym for, Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (Secondary Compulsory Education)

³A proper definition of wikis is found in the next paragraph.

⁴Cunningham, Ward. <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiHistory>

⁵Since all these students are native speakers of Spanish and learners of English as an L2, some parts of the content taught in this class may have to be clarified in Spanish.

⁶ This could explain why this activity should start during the second week of class and not the first.

⁷ If assigned once a week

⁸ Students must always be required to acknowledge sources.

⁹ S/he is able and responsible for checking this.

¹⁰ These are approximate percentages.



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